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**Sara On Site: % Long Beach, California: LONG BEACH**  
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## LONG BEACH

# A SOPHISTICATED CITY — AND A BEACH, TOO!

*Southern California conjures up images of the beach, not a city with an efficient, full-service convention facility and a busy, bustling downtown. Long Beach is one Southern California destination that offers groups the best of both worlds: big city sophistication and the relaxing, friendly atmosphere of a beach resort; world-class meeting facilities within easy walking distance of sand, surf, and sailboats.*

**A**ptly named, Long Beach is five-and-a-half miles of wide white sand, along which there are parks, bike and running trails. Almost every hotel as well as the convention center have beautiful views of the Pacific Ocean. In addition, the city is large enough for conventions but small enough that a mid-sized meeting of 1,800 attendees doesn't get lost. "Long Beach gives groups that might be one of many groups in a bigger city the feeling of 'owning the city' while their convention takes place," said Brad Weaber, CMP, senior vice president of Conferon Inc. "Yet, it has all the amenities of many major cosmopolitan destinations." "The city is 'Southern California light,'" said Eleanor DeMoors, CMP, director of meetings and exhibits for the National Telecommunications Cooperative Association (NTCA). "It is on the water, has views, but is more compact and walkable than larger cities." Indeed, the Convention and Entertainment Center, hotels and entertainment are in a four-square-block city center, easy for walking, but with free transportation for those who want to ride. "This city is designed for conventions like no other city," said Michael Washington, general manager for the Westin Long Beach.

**A City that Loves Conventions**

"When I was booking my annual convention for 2009, I truly felt that the city wanted my business — not just the hotels, the convention center, and the convention and visitors bureau," DeMoors said. "During my site inspection, the president of the CVB board, a businesswoman, took the time to have lunch with me and answered questions. The entire city realizes the value of conferences; they are very appreciative and welcoming."

"Our group felt very well taken care of," said Patty Reed, national conference co-chair of the American Orff-Schulwerk Association, an association of teachers of music, dance, and drama. "We felt like the entire city valued having us there."

It's an assessment Weaber shares. "The city is aware that bringing a meeting to Long Beach is a business opportunity. They are very much in tune with what conventions bring to the local economy. The CVB has done a very good job of communicating that to all aspects of the hospitality industry — from servers in restaurants to general managers in hotels, to investors in hospitality properties," he said.

Mayor Beverly O'Neill attributes much of this tourism awareness to Steve Goodling, president and CEO of the Long Beach CVB. "Steve and his Team Long Beach have done a fabulous job of making the work of the CVB visible, and encouraging the business community to be part of the team to bring tourism to the city," she said.

The business community's support for tourism is not just window dressing. The Downtown Long Beach Association is made up of businesses that are assessed a special fee for a downtown-cleaning program, in addition to the street cleaning the city provides. The assessment also supports plantings and landscaping to make the downtown area more beautiful. The association's downtown guides, wearing easily visible red shirts, act as concierges to visitors and conventioners alike.

Hotel general managers and the CVB board of directors also added a special assessment to be charged to hotel guests, in order to provide support to the CVB beyond what was budgeted from the room tax. As another example of business support for tourism, the owner of the Yellow Cab Company in Long Beach bought six London cabs for his fleet, building on the attraction of the Queen Mary to bring tourism to Long Beach.

**Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center**

Large meetings are well-served by the Long Beach Convention and Entertainment Center, which combines the usual features of a meeting facility — with exhibit halls and meeting rooms — with the added attraction of a music hall, theater, and an arena. "We are a complex complex," quipped Ellen Schwartz, director of sales and marketing for the center.

The convention center offers three exhibit halls: Hall A has 91,000 square feet; Hall B, 57,000 square feet; and Hall C, 76,000 square feet. Each can be rented separately or the halls can be combined into one large exhibit area. Hall A has a unique feature: windows! Hall C has an entrance from the South Dock that can be accessed by large, rolling equipment shows, featuring airplanes or automobiles.

The convention center has an easily defined formula for renting meeting rooms. Groups booking Hall A are assigned the "100" meeting rooms (rooms 101-104, each of which can be divided into two or three sections). Groups booking Hall B are assigned the "200" meetings rooms (rooms 201-204, which can be divided into two or three sections); and Hall C, the "300" meeting rooms (rooms 301-308). Along with the "100" rooms comes the 13,200-square-foot Promenade Ballroom, which can be divided into three sections. With the "300" rooms comes the 6,317-square-foot Seaside Ballroom, divisible into two sections. The convention center also features the 20,000-square-foot Grand Ballroom.

The adjacent Long Beach Arena's exterior walls are covered with the world's largest mural, Planet Ocean, which features an array of marine life by internationally renowned environmental artist, Wyland. The arena boasts 46,000 square feet and 13,500 seats. The site of concerts, ice hockey and other sporting events, it also can be rented for general sessions and/or additional exhibit space.

The Long Beach Performing Arts Center is another striking component of the "complex complex." The Terrace Theater seats 2,969 people on three levels, including 30 wheelchair spaces. It can be rented for general sessions by meeting organizers as well.

Also located in the Performing Arts Center, the Center Theater provides a smaller, more intimate theater setting. Designed in an amphitheater style, the facility has 825 seats that are set 13 rows deep in a half-round shape. This theater is not usually rented to groups, however, Schwartz emphasized that the center staff is "willing to be flexible" if the Center Theater is not in use.

This flexibility impressed DeMoors, whose convention had requirements not often covered in the standard convention center contract. "There was no hassle," DeMoors declared. "This is one of the best groups of people I have ever worked with."

#### Hotels

There are 1,500 guest rooms within a four-block area of the center. "The major convention hotels all have the same level of accommodations and service. This helps planners with the attrition problem," said Barbi Mason, vice president of convention services and membership for the Long Beach CVB. "It is difficult for meeting attendees to book outside the block."

- The Hyatt Regency Long Beach offers 522 guest rooms and 27,000 square feet of meeting space. This includes the 10,000-square-foot Regency Ballroom, which can be divided into seven sections. The adjacent 6,000-square-foot Regency Foyer is the perfect site for prefunction receptions or breaks. Across from the Regency Foyer lies the 4,400-square-foot Beacon Ballroom, which overlooks the Queen Mary, the Pacific Ocean, and Catalina Island. The third ballroom, the Seaview, features a large foyer and stunning Rotunda, providing 7,000 square feet of highly flexible space. The Shoreline, Pacific, and Harbor Rooms — which round out the meeting space — are perfect for breakout sessions or smaller groups. During 2006, the Hyatt Regency will construct the Grand Pavilion, a glass-enclosed function room seating 600 for dinner, adjacent to the city park and the lagoons. % The Westin Long Beach offers 41,000 square feet of meeting space, including the 13,434-square-foot Centennial Ballroom, divisible into four sections, and the 2,250-square-foot Ocean Ballroom. An additional 10 meeting rooms are available for breakout sessions or smaller meetings.
- The Renaissance Long Beach offers 374 guest rooms and suites, and 15,000-plus square feet of meeting space in 18 meeting rooms. The 7,480-square-foot Renaissance Ballroom can be divided into four sections, and is conveniently adjacent to six breakout rooms, which seat between 540 and 1,000 people. The elegant, formal Floreal Room is a perfect venue for a VIP dinner. And the Vivaldi Room makes a good first impression for a welcome reception, with its dance floor, bar, and private, side entrance.
- The Hilton Long Beach is adjacent to the Long Beach World Trade Center (WTC) and manages the WTC's meeting space that includes a 3,200-square-foot conference theater, which seats up to 80 people; the theater foyer; the 29,000-square-foot outdoor plaza; and the 10,000-square-foot Garden Lanai. The hotel itself offers 393 guest rooms and suites, and 29,000 square feet of meeting space. The 9,730-square-foot International Ballroom can be divided into five sections and the 4,700-square-foot Catalina is one room. A spacious 7,161-square-foot prefunction area provides ample room for receptions and refreshment breaks. There are also nine additional smaller meeting rooms. The Hilton also houses the Executive Meeting Center (EMC) @ Hilton Long Beach. This International Association of Conference Centers (IACC)-approved facility is designed as a distraction-free environment that meets the strict IACC standards. The EMC features 12 meeting rooms that can accommodate group sizes from five to 100.
- Farther away from the center of downtown, sits the legendary Queen Mary, a former ocean liner and troop transport (during World War II) which now serves as a hotel and special event site. Permanently docked in Long Beach and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Queen Mary offers 40,000 square feet of meeting space, 45,000 square feet of exhibit space, and 365 hotel rooms. The former boiler room is now a three-tiered exhibit hall. Guests sleep in the former first-class staterooms. Special events and meetings take place in the former ballrooms, and public areas. The 9,000-square-foot Grand Salon and the 4,600-square-foot Queen's Salon make striking meeting rooms. Another particularly flexible space is the Britannia Salon and its adjacent deck, which combined offer 7,000 square feet of space. "Often, groups hold meetings in the salon, and have their reception and breaks on the deck," said Sabine Dubois, vice president of catering for the Queen Mary. You can even rent the Observation Bar, for groups of 150 to 170 people. The Queen Mary offers a variety of entertainment options which can be worked into your programming, such as the Ghost Encounters Tour or the Ghost and Legends Tour. "Our members were very excited about the historical aspects of the Queen Mary," said Diane Donohue, CMP, director of meetings and conventions for the California Newspaper Publishers Association. Her group held its annual convention on the Queen Mary in July 2004, with 425 attendees. "We planned our reception and banquet around the 'ghost' theme, with fortune tellers and 'mediums' present. Then, after dinner, the members took the ghost tour," she said.
- If you wish to hold your meeting closer to the Long Beach Airport, the Long Beach Marriott is located just five minutes away from the airport but only 15 minutes from the city center. The Marriott is the site for in-house "meet and eat" groups, but also cooperates with citywide conventions. The Marriott is a resort unto itself and its 311 guest rooms have double-sealed windows, so that airplane noise is not a problem.

The hotel boasts 10,000 square feet of flexible meeting space, including the 6,000-square-foot Grand Ballroom, which is divisible into six sections. An additional six meeting rooms can accommodate up to 70 people each.

Each planner with whom I spoke emphasized that the hotels work together and cooperate, rather than compete. Remarked DeMoors, "The hotels 'put away their ego' to cooperate with your requests. That includes going over the usual committable block. 'You tell us what you need' was the usual response."

Weaver has had the same experience. "Their goal is to bring business to Long Beach. If they can't take your group, they will refer you to another Long Beach hotel," he said.

#### Alternative Sites

The number of alternative sites within easy walking distance of the convention facilities and hotels is simply amazing. Among them:

- The Pike at Rainbow Harbor, an ocean-side complex with restaurants, retail shops, and entertainment centers.
- The Mai Tai Bar can host groups from 250 to 300 for a reception, or 100-150 for a sit-down dinner. Downstairs, the Bubba Gump Shrimp Co. restaurant can accommodate groups of up to 400.

- The Aquarium of the Pacific is perhaps one of the best-known landmarks in Long Beach. Up to 500 people can be served at a seated dinner, and as many as 1,200 for a reception on two floors of the aquarium. Your guests may wander around the aquarium during the reception, to visit 19 major habitats and 32 smaller exhibits. The Harbor Terrace, just outside the Great Hall, may also be rented. The Café Scuba, which serves as the restaurant for the aquarium can be rented for meetings for up to 100. One additional venue is the front lawn of the 5-acre site, which can accommodate as many as 800 people.
- Shoreline Village is home to Parkers' Lighthouse Restaurant, which offers 250-seat open dining rooms, a 120-seat third-floor Galley Bar, and 144-seat outdoor patio.
- The Long Beach Museum of Art is housed in a historic Craftsman mansion, circa 1912, on the oceanfront.
- The Museum of Latin American Art offers a variety of spaces for special meetings, events, or dinners.
- Rancho Los Alamitos (Ranch of the Little Cottonwoods), a 7.5-acre site can host hoe-downs or elegant lawn functions.

#### Help in Planning Your Meeting

When contracts are signed, each group — no matter how small — is assigned a convention services manager (CSM). "Sometimes, the smaller groups [at other destinations] are handled by volunteers, not meeting professionals. They may need more help," Mason said. The CSM can smooth the way for all activities, reducing the time planners would normally spend organizing a meeting. Convention Services maintains a databank of services and organizations providing everything from transportation entertainment to tours, spouse functions, and speakers.

The Long Beach CVB's Housing Bureau is fully computerized and enabled by Passkey.

The CVB will set up kiosks at the convention center or hotels, with welcome notices, and information such as shuttle schedules. They will arrange retail and restaurant discounts for conventioners. The CVB also staffs a Restaurant and Information Booth in the convention center's promenade lobby. This complimentary service is provided from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on show days for all conventions that utilize the exhibit hall(s).

It's further proof that Long Beach, as Weaver puts it, is one destination that "gets" the convention business."

## AN INTERVIEW WITH BEVERLY O'NEILL MAYOR OF THE CITY OF LONG BEACH

*Long Beach Mayor Beverly O'Neill has spent three terms helping Long Beach develop its "three T's" plan, which she shared with Convene's Contributing Editor Sara Torrence, CMP.*

The mayor of the city of Long Beach, Beverly O'Neill, is a true advocate of tourism — evidenced by the fact that she took time to speak with me, even as she was preparing to lead a delegation of the U.S.

Conference of Mayors, of which she is president, to the Katrina-damaged Gulf Coast. CVB President and CEO Steve Goodling noted that the mayor has personally been responsible for bringing \$14 million in business from national conventions, by speaking to conventions and meeting executives. She is serving her third term as mayor — unusual in California, since a statute limits individuals for running for more than two consecutive terms. However, Mayor O'Neill did not run for her third term, but was swept back into office by an unprecedented overwhelming write-in campaign, which handily defeated the competition. Convene: Mayor O'Neill, ever since I arrived in Long Beach, I have heard about your strong support for tourism. Please give me some background.

**Mayor O'Neill:** Over the last 100 years, the focus of Long Beach had been on different drivers for the economy. Primarily, that was defense. We were home to a navy base, hospital, and shipyard. Also, MacDonnell Douglas was one of the largest employers, building troop transport aircraft for the Department of Defense. Later, MacDonnell Douglas merged with Boeing, which continued to build airlift craft for the military.

In the early 1990s with the Cold War over, these companies began to downsize. At the same time, we learned we were going to lose the shipyard, navy base, and naval hospital. It was a baffling time. We in Long Beach had to decide what we wanted to do when we grew up. In my first campaign, I emphasized that we concentrate on a three-point plan, the "three T's:" trade, tourism, and technology. The three T's have become our economy's new "engine drivers." But it has taken time.

In my first term, we concentrated on getting land back from the Navy. This came about slowly. In my second term, we developed our international trade. Long Beach and Los Angeles make up the third-largest port complex in the world, which focuses mostly on trade with Southeast Asia. We also looked at tourism. We had the sun, sand, and location to make us a major destination. But the hospitality community was not as organized as it is now. The convention center was expanded in 1995, to include Halls B and C, and the associated meeting rooms. The Long Beach Performing Arts Center was part of that expansion. In 1998, the Aquarium of the Pacific was opened. Along the way, the older hotels were renovated and newer ones were built. In 1995, our hotel occupancy was 43 percent; today, it has risen to 79 percent. As to technology, we have three "hot spots" for wireless technology: at the Boeing Sea Landing, the airport, and in the central downtown area.

**Convene:** That is very impressive progress in a short time. Please tell me how have you included others in the business community in tourism. How have you been involved?

**Mayor O'Neill:** First of all, Steve Goodling and his team have been doing a fabulous job in making our city more visible, and cooperating with the community. We do what is important to encourage tourism, and to include as many people as possible in our team. For myself, I enjoy meeting convention organizers, and encouraging them to come to our city. I have visited conventions, made videos for use by the CVB, and have supported the development of the Downtown Long Beach Association. Our people are enjoying being a hospitality city.

— S.T.

## LONG BEACH FACTOIDS

- Long Beach was "Hollywood before there was Hollywood." Long before Hollywood was the center of the movie industry, Long Beach was the site of silent filmmaking.
- Long Beach is the site where "CSI Miami" and "Vegas" are shot, except for the lead in shots on location in the named cities.
- Catalina Island was the site of "Gilligan's Island."
- Buffalo herds, brought over years ago by a movie company for a film, still call Catalina Island home.
- The geodesic-style dome that once housed Howard Hughes' "Spruce Goose," and serves as the Carnival Cruise Line terminal, is the largest geodesic-style clear span dome in the world.
- William Wrigley Jr. owned Catalina Island, and used it as the location for spring training for his Chicago Cubs baseball team in the 1920s. Stationed on an island, they were less likely to be distracted from practice, Wrigley thought.
- Lighted oil drilling islands in Alamitos Bay are named after four downed astronauts — Grissom, Chaffee, White, and Freeman.
- The 2000 Census revealed that Long Beach is the most culturally diverse city in the United States.

- Long Beach houses the largest Cambodian population outside of Cambodia.
- Bob Hope began his career being Master of Ceremonies (MC) at shows on the Queen Mary (when she was an ocean liner).
- Long Beach has the largest marina operated by a city, with slips for 3,800 boats.

— S.T.

## Catalina Island

"Twenty-six miles across the sea, Santa Catalina is waiting for me," go the words of the popular song from the '60s. In fact, the distance is 22 miles from Long Beach — offering a fantastic alternative event site. The island is marketed by the Catalina Island Chamber of Commerce (C of C) and Visitors Bureau, but enjoys a close relationship with the Long Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The island is accessed by the Catalina Express, which makes seven daily departures from Long Beach on high-speed, comfortable jet catamarans that seat 325 passengers. The trip takes only one hour. Larger, 700-passenger ships, which make the trip in two hours, can also be chartered. A faster, but much smaller, way to travel is via Island Express Helicopter. Golf carts are used to transport visitors and residents alike.

The island offers not only a beautiful downtown in Avalon, with walking streets lined with shops and restaurants, but also some fine event venues. The Descanso Beach Club, with its Seaside Restaurant and Bar, can host groups up to 300 at a picnic. You can rent the lawn and beach and/or the patio for barbecues. The club offers a stage for presentations or awards ceremonies; changing stations, in case you allow time for swimming and sun bathing; and equipment for snorkeling, kayaking, volleyball, and horseshoes.

The Avalon Ballroom is located in the historic Casino Building on the waterfront. A longtime home to the most famous dance bands in the world, the facility was really never used for gambling. Today, this beautiful venue, with fantastic views to Avalon Bay and the ocean, can be yours for rental. It seats 1,200 theater-style, and 850 for a dinner dance. A stage with audiovisual equipment is also featured. Many dance competitions have been held here.

The Avalon Theater is also located in the Casino Building. With its beautiful sparkling ceiling and plush velvet fixed seating for 1,200, it is a venue for film festivals as well as general sessions and special events. Originally used for showing silent films, the theater still has an organ at the foot of the stage. You might even simulate a silent movie, complete with organ accompaniment, to announce award winners! The Catalina Country Club can also be rented for meetings or special events. The Avalon Bay Room seats 40 classroom-style and 30 in U-shape setup. The board room seats 30 in classroom setup; and 20, at a T-shaped table. The elegant dining room, with Spanish décor and high ceilings, is adjacent to a tiled outdoor garden courtyard. You might consider using it for a reception preceding dinner in the dining room.

"We try to never say never; we do our best to accommodate all of our customers' requests," noted DeeDee Sidars, account executive, special events, for the Catalina Island Resort Services, Inc., which operates all three venues.

**For more information, visit [www.catalina.com](http://www.catalina.com) or [www.visitcatalina.com](http://www.visitcatalina.com).**

## GETTING THERE AND GETTING AROUND

### Airlines:

Long Beach Airport (LGB) is only six miles from central downtown. It is a small, compact airport, very easy to navigate. Cabs, limousines, shuttle services, and rental car stations are right outside the door. LGB is the West Coast hub for JetBlue Airlines and is also served by American Airlines, America West, and Alaska Airlines. LGB has over 41 daily commercial flights to more than 300 cities. Two other airports add to the "lift capacity" of the destination — Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), 18 miles to the North, and John Wayne Airport in Orange County, 19 miles to the Southwest.

### Ground transportation:

Interstate highways 405, 110, and 710 conveniently connect Long Beach to other parts of California and the rest of the country. Hop aboard the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) Light rail, with service from Long Beach to downtown Los Angeles and points beyond. For less than \$2 you can board the electric Blue Line trains, transfer to the Red Line subway, and be at Universal Studios in just a little more than an hour. Or, you can transfer to the Green Line, which terminates at LAX. You can also catch the Yellow Line, with service to Old Town Pasadena. Using Long Beach as your starting point, the Long Beach Passport buses are free throughout the downtown area, and link all major convention hotels, the convention center, and major sites. The Passport buses run from early in the morning until past midnight.

*The AquaLink and Aquabus, water taxis ferry passengers back and forth from the Queen Mary, Alamitos Bay Landing, and the Aquarium of the Pacific.* — S.T.

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